

# Appendix 12



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

---

CHARLES C. MADDOX, ESQ.

INSPECTOR GENERAL

INSPECTIONS AND EVALUATIONS DIVISION

***MANAGEMENT ALERT REPORT***

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
YOUTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
OAK HILL YOUTH CENTER**

**FIRE SAFETY PROBLEMS**

**MAR 03 – I - 010**

---

**DECEMBER 31, 2003**

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Office of the Inspector General**

Inspector General



December 31, 2003

Yvonne D. Gilchrist  
Director  
Department of Human Services  
2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., SE  
801 East Building  
Washington, DC 20032

Marceline D. Alexander  
Interim Director  
Youth Services Administration  
8300 Riverton Court  
Laurel, MD 20724

Dear Ms. Gilchrist and Ms. Alexander:

This is a Management Alert Report (MAR 03-I-010) to inform you of significant issues that have come to our attention as a result of our inspection of the Department of Human Services, Youth Services Administration (YSA). The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) provides these reports when we believe a serious matter requires the immediate attention of District of Columbia government officials. During the OIG's inspection of YSA, the inspection team (team) observed a number of serious fire safety deficiencies at the Oak Hill Youth Center (OHYC) in Laurel, Maryland that may threaten the safety of residents and employees.

**Background**

YSA policies and procedures state that fire hoses or extinguishers are to be available throughout OHYC; emergency evacuation plans must be posted publicly; and fire drills are to be conducted on a quarterly basis.<sup>1</sup> In order to meet OHYC's fire

---

<sup>1</sup> YSA Administrative Issuance No. 4-004, Part III- Facility Operations and Management, Chapter 4- Safety and Environmental Health. This document establishes policies and procedures for the safety programs, inspections, and fire and evacuation plans for institutional and community based residential facilities within YSA, including OHYC.

prevention and fire safety requirements, the YSA Health and Safety Officer must conduct monthly fire safety inspections of OHYC, and all inspection reports are to be kept on file and available for examination at OHYC. In addition, the Health and Safety Officer must be knowledgeable of the District's 1996 Fire Prevention Code and the 1999 District of Columbia Construction Code Supplement.

## **Observations**

### **1. Fire extinguishers were not accessible; fire drills were not being conducted; and emergency evacuation plans were not posted in critical areas.**

The team found that fire extinguishers were not readily accessible to staff members and residents. Youth Correctional Officers (YCOs) assigned to various security posts throughout OHYC did not have keys to access fire extinguisher lock boxes in the event of an emergency. The team also found that the fire extinguishers in the gymnasium were locked in a closet and were not readily accessible. According to the Recreation Specialist, the extinguishers were removed from the wall mounts to prevent residents from tampering with them.

Further, the team found that mandatory quarterly fire drills were not conducted and emergency evacuation plans were not posted in every building at OHYC. The team reviewed OHYC weekly fire inspection reports for the previous 6 months, but did not find any documentation or notes showing that quarterly fire drills had been conducted of the residential housing units. According to the Facilities Maintenance Foreman and other OHYC employees, fire drills are rarely conducted. The team found that the last documented fire drill was conducted on February 27, 2002.

Although YSA policy does not require that an emergency evacuation plan be posted at every location, the team found that many key locations at OHYC, such as classrooms, vocational buildings, and the gymnasium, lacked posted emergency evacuation plans.

### **2. OHYC does not have a trained Health and Safety Officer to conduct fire safety inspections.**

The team found that OHYC does not employ a Health and Safety Officer who is knowledgeable of the District's 1996 Fire Prevention Code and the 1999 District of Columbia Construction Code Supplement.<sup>2</sup> Rather, an untrained OHYC maintenance employee currently performs weekly fire safety inspections in conjunction with his other assigned duties. Without proper training, however, this employee cannot ensure that such inspections are conducted in accordance with the fire and construction codes referenced above, and can therefore not ensure the safety of residents and employees of OHYC.

---

<sup>2</sup> The District of Columbia FEMS, Fire Prevention Bureau uses the Fire Prevention Code and Construction Code Supplement to ensure fire safety compliance.

The team reviewed a District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS), Fire Prevention Bureau fire safety inspection report dated October 8, 2003. The report documented 88 fire safety deficiencies requiring immediate abatement. The team conducted a follow-up inspection based on the FEMS report and noted that as of November 19, 2003, 20 of the 88 deficiencies had not been abated.

The lack of a trained Health and Safety Officer knowledgeable about fire safety and construction codes likely resulted in OHYC's inability to detect and correct fire hazards and the numerous deficiencies documented by FEMS during its fire safety inspection.

**3. The locks on housing unit doors are manual and could pose a safety hazard in the event of a fire or other emergency.**

During an inspection of OHYC housing units for males, the team noted that the doors to residents' rooms have manual locks that require the use of a key.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Modular Housing Units doors have dead bolt locks with the locking mechanism located on the outside of the doors. In both cases, one of the two YCOs assigned to each housing unit must manually unlock the doors in order for residents to enter or exit their rooms. There is no other method for unlocking or securing the doors.

The team found only one set of keys for each of the 20 resident rooms in each housing unit, although there are two YCOs on duty for each unit. In the event of a fire emergency or disturbance, these conditions could pose a safety hazard to both youths and the YCOs if they are unable to unlock all doors in a timely manner.

**Recommendations**

The inaccessibility of fire extinguishers, lack of quarterly fire drills, lack of posted emergency evacuation plans, and inability to conduct adequate fire inspections may result in serious injury to youths and employees in the event of a fire emergency. Additionally, without a centrally operated door locking system, the failure to provide all YCOs with keys to resident rooms threatens the health and safety of residents and employees. Accordingly, we recommend that the YSA Administrator immediately take the following measures:

1. Ensure that all employees have access to fire extinguishers at all times.
2. Ensure that the fire extinguishers in the gymnasium are removed from the closet and re-installed on the wall mounts.
3. Ensure that all deficiencies cited by the FEMS Fire Prevention Bureau are abated immediately.

---

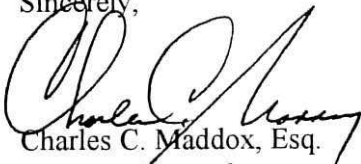
<sup>3</sup> The team documented similar concerns about the housing unit for females in OIG MAR-03-009.

4. Ensure that emergency evacuation plans are posted publicly in all key areas of OHYC.
5. Ensure that fire drills are conducted and documented quarterly as required.
6. Hire a trained Health and Safety Officer or provide adequate training to the designated OHYC employee who conducts monthly fire safety inspections.
7. Explore the feasibility of a central locking system for all doors in the residential areas so there can be quick egress in the event of a fire or other emergency.
8. Ensure that all YCOs on duty have a set of keys to all locks on the unit in order to promptly unlock doors in the event of a fire or medical emergency.

Please provide your comments to this MAR by January 16, 2003. Your response should include actions taken or planned, dates for completion of planned actions, and reasons for any disagreement with the concerns and recommendations presented. Please distribute this Management Alert Report only to those personnel who will be directly involved in preparing your response.

Should you have questions or desire a conference prior to preparing your response, please contact Lawrence Perry, Director of Planning and Inspections, at 202-727-8490.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Maddox, Esq.  
Inspector General

CCM/lp

cc: Mr. Robert C. Bobb, City Administrator  
Ms. Carolyn Graham, Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders  
James Parks, Deputy Director for Administration, DHS  
Councilmember Kathleen Patterson, Chairperson, Committee on the Judiciary